



# *the* **Chickasaw Nation**

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*Bill Anoatubby*  
Governor

*Charles W. Blackwell*  
Ambassador to the United States of America

Office of the Ambassador: 230 East Capitol Street, NE / Washington, DC 20003 / (202) 546-6654 / FAX (202) 546-6665

Before the  
**FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION**  
Washington, D.C. 20554

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

In the matter of

WT Docket No. 99-266

**Extending Wireless  
Telecommunications Services  
to Tribal Lands**

## COMMENTS OF THE CHICKASAW NATION

The Chickasaw Nation respectfully wishes to make the following comment on the above referenced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, and make provision for possible future comment. The Chickasaw Nation is located in south-central Oklahoma, has approximately thirty-nine thousand citizens, and experiences penetration rate problems similar to those described in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking with approximately thirteen thousand of its citizens who reside in the more rural areas of its tribal lands.

The Chickasaw Nation is not expert with respect to technical telecommunications matters, and, therefore, will not make comment at this time upon the more technical regulatory initiatives presented in the proposed rulemaking. This comment will touch on the aspects of tribal sovereignty and the federal trust relationship raised in various provisions of the proposed rulemaking. The Chickasaw Nation, through the office of its ambassador in Washington, D.C., is well aware of the consultations, educational briefings, hearings, and other activities of the Commission to educate itself on tribal sovereignty and the tenets of the federal trust responsibility. These efforts and activities are appreciated.

An important point of clarification, particularly with respect to those tribes within Oklahoma, concerns the use of the term "Indian lands". Indian lands are referred to as Indian

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National Headquarters: Post Office Box 1548 / Ada, OK 74821 / (580) 436-2603  
NADG@EROLS.COM

Country, the definition of which is provided at 18 U.S.C. § 1151. Indian Country includes reservations, formal or informal<sup>1</sup>, Indian allotments and dependent Indian Communities. The definition of Indian Country was crafted for federal criminal law purposes, however, it applies equally to federal civil jurisdiction.<sup>2</sup> We suggest the Commission adopt this definition in its further rulemaking. Use of the term Indian Country will assure uniformity by clearly including tribal citizens residing on federal trust and former reservation lands in Oklahoma.

With respect to possible regulatory initiatives designed to encourage wireless carriers to provide basic service on tribal lands, the granting of "additional flexibility" in the licensing procedure should be predicated upon the existence of, and compliance with, a binding agreement between the licensee and the relevant tribal authority. The importance of tribal sovereignty in this procedure is paramount. Inherent in tribal sovereign authority is the right to control certain activities on tribal lands. This includes the right to regulate and tax nonmember corporations doing business on tribal lands. It is fundamental premise in the law that a tribe may regulate, through licensing, taxation, or other means, the activities of nonmembers who enter consensual relationships with the tribe or its members through commercial dealing, contracts, leases, or other arrangements. A wireless carrier wishing to provide service on tribal lands must have tribal consent as a practical matter; therefore, whether such a requirement imposes additional burdens upon licensees is a moot question. Similarly moot is the question of whether tribal government consent should be required for the Commission to approve transfers and assignments that affect the service provided.

With respect to the implementation of such a requirement, the Chickasaw Nation is encouraged by the awareness of the Commission of the importance of the special trust relationship between tribes and the federal government. In considering the licensing aspects for a service provider to engage in the provision of wireless communications on tribal lands, the federal government must consult with the tribe on a government-to-government basis.<sup>3</sup> This process is the foundation of the trust responsibility of the United States with respect to Indian tribes and through it the true nature of the agreement between the licensee and the tribe shall be obtained.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Oklahoma Tax Commission v. Sac and Fox Nation*, 508 U.S. 114 (1993).

<sup>2</sup> *California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians*, 480 U.S. 202(1987); *Decoteau v. District County Court*, 420 U.S. 425 (1975); *Pittsburg & Midway Coal Mining Co. v. Watchman*, 52 F. 3d 1531, 1540-41 (10th Cir. 1995) ("We hold § 1151 represents an express Congressional delegation of civil authority over Indian country to the tribes."); *Indian Country U.S. A. Inc. v. State of Oklahoma*, 829 F.2d 967 (10th Cir. 1987)(the Indian Country classification is "the benchmark for approaching the allocation of federal, tribal and state authority with respect to Indians and Indian lands.")

<sup>3</sup> See Executive Order No. 13,084, 63 Fed. Reg. 27,655 (May 14, 1998).

Finally, the Chickasaw Nation is encouraged also by the breadth of the possible marketplace incentives presented in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. The consideration to provide licensees with special licensing areas and bidding credits, and the potential availability to tribes of drop-in licenses are possibilities that may represent effective methods to address low penetration rates. The Chickasaw Nation recognizes the need for innovative techniques and methods to deal with the variety of unique tribal situations that exist in the Chickasaw Nation and throughout Indian Country.

The Chickasaw Nation thanks Chairman Kennard and his colleagues on the Commission for their continued efforts and commitment to solve this problem in Indian Country. The Chickasaw Nation expresses its gratitude to the Chairman and Commissioner Tristani for their consultations with Ambassador Charles W. Blackwell concerning tribal sovereignty and the federal trust relationship, and looks forward to further participation in the rulemaking process on this important matter.